



INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

REPORT 2021/008

Audit of official travel at the United Nations Office at Geneva

Clients were generally satisfied with the quality and timeliness of travel services, but efficiency and cost effectiveness of travel arrangements need to be enhanced

31 March 2021

Assignment No. AE2020/310/02

Audit of official travel at the United Nations Office at Geneva

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of official travel at the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG). The objective of the audit was to assess the efficiency and cost effectiveness of travel arrangements at UNOG. The audit covered the period from 1 January 2018 to 30 June 2020 and focused on assessing: (a) the efficiency and cost effectiveness of travel arrangements; and (b) arrangements governing UNOG's relations with its clients.

Clients were generally satisfied with the quality and timeliness of the travel services. However, efficiency and cost effectiveness of travel arrangements need to be enhanced.

OIOS made four recommendations. To address issues identified in the audit, UNOG needed to:

- Facilitate briefing and information sharing sessions for client travel focal points and certifying officers to enhance awareness of their role in overseeing compliance with the 16-day advance ticket purchase requirement;
- Explore options to maximize the use of the online booking tool and related cost savings;
- Ensure that the penalty clause in the new contract with the travel agency is clear and stipulates the workload threshold beyond which the penalties would not be applicable; and
- Conclude with the Travel Management Company a final settlement amount that would net off any outstanding accounts payable and receivable before the contract comes to an end.

UNOG accepted the recommendations and has initiated action to implement them.

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Audit of official travel at the United Nations Office at Geneva

I. BACKGROUND

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of official travel at the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG).
2. UNOG arranges travel for its staff and their family members, members of governing bodies, meeting participants and consultants. The Staff Regulations and Rules (ST/SGB/2009/4) define the modes and standards of accommodation for travel by staff members and eligible family members on initial appointment, official business, change of official duty station, separation from service, medical reasons, safety and security reasons, home leave and family visits. The Secretary-General's Bulletin (ST/SGB/107/Rev.6) governs payment of travel expenses and subsistence allowance in respect of members of organs or subsidiary organs of the United Nations. The administrative instruction on official travel (ST/AI/2013/3) and Information Circular (ST/IC/2019/16) provide further guidance on official travel.
3. Travel expenditures incurred on tickets purchased by UNOG for itself and on behalf of its clients were \$22 million for 22,000 air tickets issued in 2018 and \$24 million for 25,000 air tickets issued in 2019. For UNOG, the expenses were \$735,000 for a total of 909 trips in the 2018-2019 biennium. Other major expenditure for 2018-2019 related to: (i) the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), \$16.5 million; (ii) the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), \$7.5 million; and (iii) the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), \$4.0 million.
4. The Travel and Logistics Unit (TLU) within the Procurement and Transport Section (PTS) of the Central Support Service in the Division of Administration is responsible for making travel arrangements for staff and other travellers related to UNOG and its clients. TLU's responsibilities include: (i) processing travel requests and assisting staff on travel related issues; (ii) negotiating with airlines; and (iii) managing the contract with the Travel Management Company. UNOG established a contract with the Travel Management Company for the provision of travel agency services including booking and ticketing services, a 24-hour helpline, visa services and an online booking tool. The contract not-to-exceed amount was CHF15 million for a duration of seven years from 1 May 2014 to 30 April 2021. The service fees paid to the Travel Management Company in 2018 and 2019 were CHF1.7 million per year.
5. TLU is headed by a P-4 Head of Unit reporting to the Chief of PTS (P-5) and supported by 43 staff (1 P-3, 1 P-2 and 41 General Service). Of the 41 General Service posts, eight were under the Travel Sub-Unit and dedicated to the processing of travel, while the rest were for Logistics Sub-Unit and Diplomatic Client Services Sub-Unit. At the time of the audit, one of the eight posts in the Travel Sub-Unit was vacant.
6. Comments provided by UNOG are incorporated in italics.

II. AUDIT OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

7. The objective of the audit was to assess the efficiency and cost effectiveness of travel arrangements at UNOG.
8. This audit was included in the 2020 risk-based work plan of OIOS due to the importance of effective and efficient travel arrangements in the implementation of the Organization's mandate.

9. OIOS conducted this audit from July to November 2020. The audit covered the period from 1 January 2018 to 30 June 2020. The audit focused on assessing: (a) the efficiency and cost effectiveness of travel arrangements and (b) the arrangements governing UNOG's relations with its clients.

10. The audit methodology included: (a) interviews with key personnel; (b) review of relevant documentation; (c) analytical review of data; and (d) sample testing.

11. The audit was conducted in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing.

III. AUDIT RESULTS

A. Efficiency and cost-effectiveness of travel arrangements

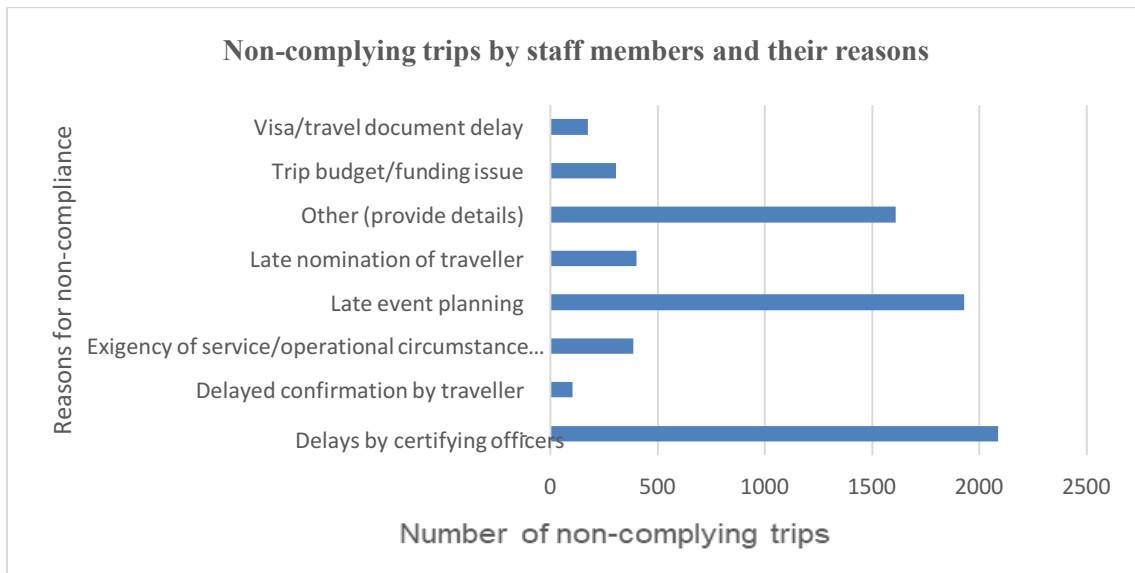
TLU processed travel requests in a timely manner and implemented some cost saving initiatives

12. OIOS analysed data for trips processed in 2018 and 2019 and noted that TLU had a quick turn-around time for handling travel requests, which it approved in less than one day on average. This was within the five days of processing travel requests set by the United Nations travel policy (ST/AI/2013/3). The travel focal points for the four largest clients (OHCHR, OCHA, UNCTAD and the United Nations Environmental Programme) and 29 of the 30 frequent travellers OIOS interviewed were satisfied with TLU services. They commended TLU for its quick approval of travel requests, efficient visa facilitation services and the 24-hour hotline service and stated that TLU staff went beyond their normal call of duty to assist stranded travellers. Further, UNOG had negotiated discounts with 24 airlines which, according to the analysis done by the Travel Management Company, resulted in savings of at least \$3.5 million per year compared to the airlines' published rates. The decision to relocate the Travel Management Company from Geneva to Poland in 2017, as well as the implementation of the online booking tool in 2019 also resulted in savings. The cost paid to the Travel Management Company for processing one trip dropped by 57 per cent (from CHF137 to CHF59) as a result of the move to Poland, and to only CHF8 when the tickets were booked through the online booking tool, resulting in savings of approximately CHF 1.3 million in 2018 and 2019.

Need to enhance clients' monitoring of timeliness in the purchase of travel tickets

13. Empirical evidence has shown over time that the price of air tickets tends to be more costly if purchased too close to the travel date. Because of this, the United Nations Secretariat put in place a travel policy that requires tickets to be bought at least 16 days in advance of commencement of travel and justifications provided in cases where the 16-day advance ticket purchase guideline is not complied with. For example, OIOS analysed the price of tickets for the Geneva-Vienna route in the 2018-2019 biennium and noted that where travel requests were processed well in advance (16 days or more), the ticket could be as low as \$86 (though the bulk averaged around \$190). However, when processed one to five days before travel, the ticket price could be as high as \$890 (10 times higher than the cheapest possible ticket). While it is not always the case that timely booking is cheaper (and in fact there are cases where late booking could be cheaper), overall, the 16-day advance ticket purchase guideline is a reasonable requirement and efforts need to be made to monitor and enhance compliance.

14. An analysis of 2018 and 2019 trips processed by TLU for both UNOG and its clients showed that approximately 52 per cent of the tickets were not purchased 16 days in advance. Roughly, half of the non-compliant trips were by staff members, while the other half were by non-staff travellers. The figure below shows reasons for non-compliance.



15. There were two main reasons for non-compliance. The first reason pertained to delays by certifying officers in approving trips submitted in time by the travellers. The process flow was that a traveller was expected to submit the travel request in Umoja at least 21 days in advance, and all processing needed to be finalised within five days, first by the certifying officer (or human resource partner if the trip is related to human resource travel) and then finally by TLU. Whereas TLU processed travel requests within a single day, certifying officers sometimes took more than 21 days to process some of the travel requests. Review of UNOG data, as well as that of its clients, showed that although in some cases such delays may have had underlying and justifiable reasons, there were only few instances when certifying officers actually stated such reasons in Umoja. It was not possible, therefore, to know fully which of the delays by certifying officers were justified and which ones were not.

16. The second main reason for the delay is late event planning. This concerns events organized by UNOG or its clients (internal events) as well as external events. For internal events, there was a need for increasing awareness among event planners to always take into account the 16-day advance ticket purchase guideline when planning such events. Such a call for increased awareness was also made in the 2019 Secretary-General’s report on standards of accommodation for air travel (A/73/705). Apart from that, some travellers stated their reason for non-compliance as “Other”. The Umoja system requires travellers and travel administrators to provide additional details when selecting “Other”, which involves free text input. A more detailed analysis of the free text input indicates that the reasons typically mirror the list of predefined reasons available, which are reflected in the graph above (such as late event planning, late nomination of traveller). Travellers and certifying officers need to be more diligent in ensuring that suitable reasons are selected to enhance the reliability of the data generated.

17. The Secretariat has put in place various measures to enhance the monitoring of compliance with the 16-day advance ticket purchase guideline. This included the inclusion of the advance ticket purchase guideline as a key performance indicator in departmental performance reporting for the biennium 2018–2019 and the introduction of an online dashboard in 2019. The dashboard provides an improved, visually illustrative presentation of advance ticket purchase statistics and supporting detailed data for each client. It is essential that relevant staff and managers in each entity have access to the data so that they can use it to monitor compliance with the 16-day advance ticket purchase guideline and to help detect where delays and inefficiencies lie. This would be in line with the Secretary-General’s data strategy which recommends use

of data to inform decision-making. However, at the time of the audit there was limited awareness amongst UNOG clients regarding the availability of the detailed travel data in the dashboard.

18. Further, the Secretariat had developed an online training for certifying officers which addresses, among other topics, their role in official travel including their responsibility in ensuring compliance with the 16-day advance ticket purchase guideline. It was the responsibility of individual entities and offices to ensure that all certifying officers (including those appointed before the training was developed) undertake this training. Individual entities are also responsible for establishing any additional internal arrangements for approving exceptions in complying with the 16-day advance ticket purchase guideline and monitoring overall compliance rates. For instance, at UNOG Division of Administration, a new requirement was established in 2020 where all exceptions to compliance with the 16-day guideline have to be approved by the Director of Administration.

19. While UNOG/TLU is not directly responsible for monitoring compliance with the 16-day advance ticket purchase guideline for its clients, as a central travel services provider, it could play an important role in guiding and supporting its clients as appropriate, given the importance of timely booking of tickets in potentially saving costs. As noted above, access to data relating to compliance with the 16-day advance ticket purchase guideline and the need to ensure that the data is reliable is currently an area of need. TLU could support its client focal points and certifying officers with relevant briefing and information sharing sessions to increase their knowledge and awareness of available data. The certifying officers could also be sensitized on the need to ensure that the justifications for non-compliance with the 16-day advance ticket purchase guideline are appropriately recorded to enhance the usefulness of the data.

(1) UNOG should facilitate briefing and information sharing sessions for client travel focal points and certifying officers to enhance awareness of their role in overseeing compliance with the 16-day advance ticket purchase requirement.

UNOG accepted recommendation 1 and stated that pursuant to Staff Rule 7.8, the primary responsibility for ensuring that the 16-day advance ticket purchase requirement is adhered to lies with the staff member. ST/AI/2013/3 further clarifies that programme managers will be required to provide justification on all official travel arrangements that could not be finalized 16 calendar days in advance of the commencement of travel. It is therefore clear that the responsibility for compliance and monitoring of this rule lies with the entity that approves the travel request, and the advance ticket purchase guideline is tracked as a key performance indicator for each entity under the new delegation of authority, and each entity has access to the dashboard to track this information. However, even though each entity has the responsibility and tools to measure their compliance with the 16-day rule, UNOG will arrange briefings and information sharing sessions to client travel focal points and certifying officers to further raise awareness. Recommendation 1 remains open pending receipt of evidence that UNOG has arranged briefing and information sharing sessions for client travel focal points and certifying officers.

Use of the online booking tool needs to be optimized

20. Apart from bookings made by the Travel Management Company, bookings could also be done through self-ticketing or utilization of the online booking tool. Overall, self-ticketing accounted for five per cent of the travel expenses. In accordance with ST/IC/2019/16, it is incumbent upon the traveller to report if a more economical ticket is available from a different source. In 2018 and 2019, UNOG saved an average of \$85,000 per year as a result of self-ticketing. The use of self-ticketing however has some disadvantages including: (a) inability to track the traveller which is useful in case of incidents and no shows; (b) the fact that the risk is fully on staff members if a ticket needs to be re-booked or re-arranged; and (c) loss of volume to the organization that could help in the negotiation of airline discounts. Because of these

disadvantages, UNOG's approach is to limit the use of self-ticketing to those situations where TLU is not able to provide the tickets or where there is a substantial saving on the ticket price itself.

21. The online booking tool was implemented in the first quarter of 2019. The main point of utilizing the tool is to benefit from a decreased transaction fee payable to the Travel Management Company. Instead of charging CHF59 per trip as is normally the case, the Travel Management Company charges only CHF8 per trip. In addition, UNOG charges the entities it serves \$20 for the time it spends processing each trip using the online booking tool. Therefore, each entity has a net-savings of CHF31 per trip each time UNOG is able to book using the tool rather than through the Travel Management Company. Use of the online booking tool does not have any of the disadvantages associated with self-ticketing since the Travel Management Company continues to provide support and track the traveller.

22. Initially, it was envisaged that the online tool would be rolled out to all staff. Due to a number of factors, including the user-friendliness of the tool and challenges in incorporating the United Nations travel policy rules directly into the tool, UNOG decided that it should be used by TLU only rather than by the travellers themselves directly. There is extra workload for TLU when it books tickets using the online booking tool compared to when it books through the Travel Management Company. TLU had one vacancy of a G-5 post not yet filled due to the recruitment freeze which reduced its capacity to book tickets on behalf of its clients using the online booking tool. Because of this, and due to the large volumes of travel in 2019, the tool was not used as often as envisioned. TLU had planned to roll out the tool progressively over the course of 2019 with the aim of ensuring 10-20 per cent of trips were processed through the online booking tool, and to increase that usage in 2020 to 30 per cent. However, since its roll-out in February 2019, UNOG only utilized the booking tool for on average 6 per cent of the trips in 2019. Despite the relatively low usage rate in 2019, UNOG saved CHF113,969 which could have been paid to the Travel Management Company as travel-processing fees.

23. Based on the above, OIOS concluded that UNOG needs to explore options to enhance the utilization of the online booking tool in order to maximize potential savings and maintain the benefit provided by the Travel Management Company supporting and tracking the traveller. The potential to roll out the online booking tool to offices such as OHCHR who have dedicated travel staff could be explored particularly for low value tickets which are less complex. Discussions with UNOG showed that this would be possible particularly if the travel rules relating to business class travel are simplified. Further, the total cost of a G-5 staff is CHF173,700 per year. If UNOG were to have achieved its 30 per cent target of utilizing the tool, in 2019 it would have saved CHF430,710. Subtracting the cost of a G5 staff, the net saving would have been CHF257,010 which is more than double the CHF113,969 actual savings achieved. Filling the post and using the tool more would therefore be financially beneficial.

(2) UNOG should explore options to maximize the use of the online booking tool and related cost savings.

UNOG accepted recommendation 2 and stated that it will continue its efforts to maximize the use of the online booking tool. UNOG further stated that it has managed to increase the usage of the tool throughout 2020 despite the difficulties of arranging travel due to COVID-19 restrictions, with an average usage of 14.65 per cent over the course of the year. It will work to continue to increase this rate, providing COVID-19 difficulties allow, over the course of 2021 with a target of 30 per cent usage. Recommendation 2 remains open pending receipt of evidence that UNOG has explored options to maximize the use of the online booking tool and related cost savings.

Arrangements for contract management were in place but the penalty clause needs to be clearer

24. A review of the contract with the Travel Management Company showed that it had appropriate key performance indicators (KPIs). UNOG regularly monitored the KPIs and had meetings with the Travel Management Company every two weeks to discuss performance issues. UNOG kept monthly data on the level of customer satisfaction with regard to booking, ticketing, visa services, and trip management and made necessary follow-ups whenever the performance dipped below defined thresholds. Performance evaluations were also done regularly as required. However, the penalty clause in the agreement with the Travel Management Company was not clear. It seemed to imply that the Travel Management Company would either need to fail the whole year (at which point a 5 per cent penalty could be applied) or fail to meet the standard for three months in a row (at which point a 20 per cent penalty could be applied on the three months). The language used is ambiguous and would, therefore, not have been easy to enforce.

25. In 2018, the Travel Management Company did not meet the agreed target of 85 per cent of telephone calls being responded to within the agreed service level threshold, with the annual average being only 71 per cent. UNOG stated that it did not invoke the penalty clause because there was significant unforeseen upswing in demand through the months of August to November 2018 during which the Travel Management Company struggled to meet demand. Its performance through the rest of the year had however largely been in line with the KPI target. According to UNOG, imposing penalties in such a scenario would not have been fair and appropriate. However, even if such were not to be the case, the ambiguous wording of the penalty clause may have stood in the way of effectively evoking this clause. Also, since experience shows that there is possibility for significant upswing in demand, it would be useful to define the workload threshold beyond which the defined KPIs would not be applicable for purposes of invoking the penalty clause. As the contract was nearing its end, UNOG needs to address the penalty clause issue when designing the next contract.

(3) UNOG should ensure that the penalty clause in the new contract with the travel agency is clear and stipulates the workload threshold beyond which the penalties would not be applicable.

UNOG accepted recommendation 3 and stated that it had already ensured that the language on penalties in the recent tender for Travel Management Services was clearer. UNOG is currently negotiating the contract with the recommended vendor and will ensure that this recommendation is implemented. Recommendation 3 remains open pending receipt of evidence that the clause in the new contract with the travel agency is clear and stipulates the workload threshold beyond which the penalties would not be applicable.

Need to finalize reconciliation and settle outstanding amounts

26. A clause in the contract required the Travel Management Company to credit to UNOG's account, once per year, the net standard commissions and net override commissions relating to UNOG purchases after deduction of its collections and administrative costs. However, amounts pertaining to 2018 and 2019 of CHF32,000 and CHF16,720 respectively were yet to be credited to UNOG's account at the time of the audit. At the same time, the Travel Management Company stated that it could not settle the outstanding commissions because UNOG owed it CHF100,000. Reconciliations are yet to be done to agree on amounts owed to each other. While the unreconciled amounts involved are relatively low compared to the value of the contract (less than 0.5 per cent), this issue seemed unresolved for years, and the contract was due to come to an end. It is important for both UNOG and the Travel Management Company to finalize the reconciliations and settle any amounts that were outstanding with regard to this clause.

(4) UNOG should conclude with the Travel Management Company a final settlement amount that would net off any outstanding accounts payable and receivable before the contract comes to an end.

UNOG accepted recommendation 4 and stated that it has a cross-functional team that is working diligently with the Travel Management Company to clear all the unreconciled outstanding dues in a timely manner. It is expected that all outstanding accounts payable and receivable items will be cleared before the current contract with the Travel Management Company comes to an end. Recommendation 4 remains open pending receipt of evidence that UNOG has concluded with the Travel Management Company a final settlement amount that would net off any outstanding accounts payable and receivable.

Arrangements were in place for monitoring unused and cancelled tickets and refunds from airlines

27. UNOG had an average of 100 unused tickets per year. Email notifications about unused tickets were generated by the traveller during the time of preparing an expense report. TLU kept track of each email and liaised with the Travel Management Company to ensure that such tickets were cancelled and refunds from airlines obtained within three months from the final date of travel. The Travel Management Company had a tracking tool for all unused tickets and “no-shows” and provided periodic reports to TLU for monitoring purposes. Further, there was a staff assigned to track ticket cancellation requests processed through Umoja or requested via email and process refunds where applicable. TLU processed 1,553 refunds in 2018 and 1,308 refunds in 2019. There were 1,053 refund requests that related to cancellations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, with a value of \$1.2 million. By the end of October 2020, TLU had been refunded \$1 million, (80 per cent of the outstanding amount). There was email evidence that the remaining amounts were being followed up by the Travel Management Company with regular monitoring by TLU. UNOG stated that in most of the cases where tickets were non-refundable only taxes were recoverable in the event of cancellation or no-show. OIOS concluded that monitoring of unused and cancelled tickets and refunds from airlines was being done in a satisfactory manner.

B. Relations with clients

Contractual and coordination arrangements with clients were satisfactory

28. UNOG had established memoranda of understanding (MoUs) with all the clients it serves, in which roles and responsibilities and deliverables for travel processing were clearly spelt out. UNOG listed in the MoU the travel services it provided which included processing travel requests; defining entitlements; verifying fares; coordinating travel arrangements; managing the travel agent contract; and managing airline negotiations. UNOG charged its clients \$40 per transaction for the package of travel services. The \$40 rate was established by the Office of Central Support Service in New York in 2016. Some offices such as OHCHR and OCHA had staff dedicated to travel processing related functions. OHCHR, for example, had a travel unit headed by a P-4, with five general service level staff. Review of roles and responsibilities did not reveal any evidence of overlap and duplication between the OHCHR travel unit’s work and the work done by TLU. OIOS’ interviews with travel focal points in entities served by TLU also showed that they understood their role in the travelling workflow as well as TLU’s role.

29. UNOG held meetings with clients two to three times a year during which it discussed service provision and provided a formal forum for exchange with client entities. After each quarterly billing, UNOG produced and shared with its clients a quarterly operational indicator report which summarized the evolution of the workload volumes for all services it provided and turnaround times, where applicable. Additionally, UNOG carried out an annual survey to obtain feedback from clients on the services it

provides. A review of the 2018 survey showed that 100 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the services provided by TLU, with 73 per cent indicating that they were “very satisfied.” The 2019 survey was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As noted earlier in the report, client focal points and the frequent travellers that OIOS interviewed were generally satisfied with the quality and timeliness of the travel services. Further, UNOG stated that it planned to work with the Travel Management Company to provide reporting to each entity on the savings that have been achieved through the usage of the online booking tool and through airline discount negotiations.

IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

30. OIOS wishes to express its appreciation to the management and staff of UNOG for the assistance and cooperation extended to the auditors during this assignment.

(Signed) Eleanor T. Burns
Director, Internal Audit Division
Office of Internal Oversight Services

STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Audit of official travel at the United Nations Office at Geneva

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	C/ O ³	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date ⁴
1	UNOG should facilitate briefing and information sharing sessions for client travel focal points and certifying officers to enhance awareness of their role in overseeing compliance with the 16-day advance ticket purchase requirement.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that UNOG has arranged briefing and information sharing sessions for client travel focal points and certifying officers.	31 July 2021
2	UNOG should explore options to maximize the use of the online booking tool and related cost savings.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that UNOG has explored options to maximize the use of the online booking tool and related cost savings.	31 December 2021
3	UNOG should ensure that the penalty clause in the new contract with the travel agency is clear and stipulates the workload threshold beyond which the penalties would not be applicable.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that the clause in the new contract with the travel agency is clear and stipulates the workload threshold beyond which the penalties would not be applicable.	1 May 2021
4	UNOG should conclude with the Travel Management Company a final settlement amount that would net off any outstanding accounts payable and receivable before the contract comes to an end.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that UNOG has concluded with the Travel Management Company a final settlement amount that would net off any outstanding accounts payable and receivable.	1 May 2021

¹ Critical recommendations address those risk issues that require immediate management attention. Failure to take action could have a critical or significant adverse impact on the Organization.

² Important recommendations address those risk issues that require timely management attention. Failure to take action could have a high or moderate adverse impact on the Organization.

³ Please note the value C denotes closed recommendations whereas O refers to open recommendations.

⁴ Date provided by UNOG in response to recommendations.

APPENDIX I

Management Response




MEMORANDUM INTERIEUR

INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: Ms. Eleanor T, Burns, Director
A: Internal Audit Division, OIOS

DATE: 26 March 2021

REF. OIOS-2021-00333

FROM: Clemens M. Adams 
DE: Director
Division of Administration, UNOG

SUBJECT: **Draft report of an audit of official travel at the United Nations Office at
OBJET: Geneva (Assignment No. AE2020-310-02)**

1. UNOG acknowledges receipt of the draft report of an audit of official travel at the United Nations Office at Geneva (Assignment No. AE2020/310/02).
2. UNOG agrees with all the recommendations issued in this report and has completed the attached Appendix I.
3. I take this opportunity also to thank you and the Geneva OIOS team for their work, as well as for the value-added recommendations.

Cc: Ms. Victoria Browning, Chief, Central Support Services, UNOG
Ms. Sophie Veaudour, Chief, Financial Resources Management Service, UNOG
Mr. Stephen Farrell, Chief Purchase and Transportation Section, UNOG
Mr. Jonathan Morgan, Chief, Travel and Logistics Unit
Ms. Celine Noel, Audit Focal Point, UNOG
Ms. Anna Nyaoro, Chief, European Audit Section, Internal Audit Division, OIOS
Ms. Maya Fridman, Professional Practices Section, Internal Audit Division, OIOS

Management Response

Audit of official travel at the United Nations Office at Geneva

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
1	UNOG should facilitate briefing and information sharing sessions for client travel focal points and certifying officers to enhance awareness of their role in overseeing compliance with the 16-day advance ticket purchase requirement.	Important	Yes	Chief, Travel Logistics Unit	July 2021	Pursuant to Staff Rule 7.8, the primary responsibility for ensuring that the 16-day advance ticket purchase requirement is adhered to lies with the staff member. ST/AI/2013/3 further clarifies that programme managers will be required to provide justification on all official travel arrangements that could not be finalized 16 calendar days in advance of the commencement of travel. It is therefore clear that the responsibility for compliance and monitoring of this rule lies with the entity that approves the travel request, and indeed the advance ticket purchase guideline is tracked as a key performance indicator for each entity under the new delegation of authority, and each entity has access to the dashboard to track this information. However, even though each entity has the responsibility and tools to measure their compliance with the 16-day rule, UNOG will nevertheless arrange briefings and information sharing sessions to client travel focal points

¹ Critical recommendations address those risk issues that require immediate management attention. Failure to take action could have a critical or significant adverse impact on the Organization.

² Important recommendations address those risk issues that require timely management attention. Failure to take action could have a high or moderate adverse impact on the Organization.

Management Response

Audit of official travel at the United Nations Office at Geneva

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
						and certifying officers to further raise awareness
2	UNOG should explore options to maximize the use of the online booking tool and related cost savings.	Important	Yes	Chief, Travel Logistics Unit	31/12/21	UNOG will continue its efforts to maximize the use of the online booking tool. UNOG has indeed managed to continue to increase the usage of the tool throughout 2020 despite the difficulties of arranging travel due to COVID-19 restrictions, with an average usage of 14.65 per cent over the course of the year. UNOG will work to continue to increase this rate, providing COVID-19 difficulties allow, over the course of 2021 with a target of 30 per cent usage
3	UNOG should ensure that the penalty clause in the new contract with the travel agency is clear and stipulates the workload threshold beyond which the penalties would not be applicable.	Important	Yes	Chief, Travel Logistics Unit	1/05/21	UNOG has already ensured that the language on penalties in the recent tender for Travel Management Services was clearer. UNOG is currently negotiating the contract with the recommended vendor and will ensure that this recommendation is implemented.
4	UNOG should conclude with the Travel Management Company a final settlement amount that would net off any outstanding accounts payable and receivable before the contract comes to an end.	Important	Yes	Chief, Payments & Payroll Unit	1/05/21	UNOG has a cross-functional team that is working diligently with the Travel Management Company to clear all the unreconciled outstanding dues in a timely manner. It is expected that all outstanding accounts payable and receivable items will be cleared before the current contract

Management Response

Audit of official travel at the United Nations Office at Geneva

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
						with the Travel Management Company comes to an end.